



Freshwater Advisory Group – Hui 4.5

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Title of Report: The Importance of the Regional Policy Statement to Freshwater Planning

Report No: 1

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Purpose of this report

This report outlines the role of the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and why it's important for the Regional Freshwater Plan and catchment plans for the Tairāwhiti region. The report outlines key challenges / issues relating to freshwater within the region for discussion in the hui.

Outcomes sought

Members of both advisory groups:

- understand the role of the RPS and how it influences freshwater planning
- reflect on their experience and knowledge to build a collective understanding of the priority freshwater issues facing Tairāwhiti
- provide feedback on what they think the top five issues are and how these might be resolved through regulatory (for example, policies and rules) and non-regulatory measures (such as riparian restoration)
- create goals to be put in place when managing or resolving the key issues. This includes describing what success of managing that issue would look like.

Getting ready for the hui

Please consider the questions in section 5 of this report ahead of the hui. These questions will be discussed at the hui.

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1. Background and context

1.1 What is the Regional Policy Statement (RPS)?

The RPS is a policy document that provides an overview of regional resource management issues and provides strategic and integrated direction on how natural and physical resources should be managed across a region. The RPS can also set directives that regional and district plans must give effect to.

1.2 What does it need to include?

An RPS identifies significant regional resource management issues and sets objectives, policies, methods and outcomes about how the issues should be resolved or managed

The purpose of the RPS is to provide an overview of the resource management issues of the region and to set policies and methods to achieve integrated management of resources. At a minimum, an RPS must state:

- significant resource management issues for the region
- resource management issues of significance to iwi authorities
- objectives sought to be achieved
- policies regarding significant issues and objectives
- methods (excluding rules) to be used to implement the policies
- main reasons for adopting the objectives, policies and methods
- environmental results anticipated from implementing those policies and methods
- processes to deal with cross-boundary issues
- the local authority responsible for specifying objectives, policies and methods for land-use control in respect of natural hazards, hazardous substances and indigenous biological diversity
- procedures for monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of the RPS provisions.

The RPS must also give effect to government legislation, including national policy statements. In the context of freshwater planning, the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM) has the principle of Te Mana o Te Wai at its core and requires regional councils to adopt a ki uta ki tai approach to resource management (an integrated approach that recognises the interconnectedness of the whole environment).

This requires freshwater resources to be managed in an integrated way that considers the effects of the use and development of land on a whole-of-catchment basis. This includes the effects on receiving environments, in a way that puts the health and well-being of freshwater and its ecosystems first.

The RPS presents an opportunity to set a strategic direction for freshwater that highlights the key issues and directs how they are to be managed

1.3 Why is the RPS important?

The RPS sets the regional strategic direction across a broad range of resource management issues. This is done to ensure there is alignment of policy direction across and within regional and district plans. This direction also ensures that land and freshwater management across regional and district (and unitary) plans is integrated.

1.4 What is our opportunity here?

The review of the RPS presents an opportunity to identify the current key freshwater issues for Tairāwhiti – the freshwater issues that are the highest priority for the region – and ensure that these are a focus in catchment management plans as they are prepared and within the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan (TRMP) itself. A region-wide focus on the 'big ticket issues' will help ensure that they are addressed in a consistent and comprehensive way in each catchment plan and that the long-term visions we set for freshwater can be achieved.

Additionally, providing direction to these issues in the RPS better enables an integrated approach to the different elements of the environment, consistent with ki uta ki tai, and how Te Mana o Te Wai can be threaded throughout the TRMP when the different parts of the plan are reviewed.

2. The current RPS

2.1 Background

Council's current RPS is part of the combined TRMP. The RPS was notified in 1996 and made operative on 10 August 2002. The RPS has been updated several times since 2002, including updates made in 2015 during the development of the Regional Freshwater Plan. However, much of the current RPS is unchanged since 2002 and it may not be fit-for-purpose for our current operating environment in Tairāwhiti.

As part of the wider TRMP review, development of a new RPS makes up one of the three workstreams. The two other workstreams are the Urban Growth and Development workstream and the Freshwater Planning workstream. The draft RPS is intended to be ready for feedback in early 2024. Formal notification of the proposed RPS is planned for later in 2024.

2.2 What issues are addressed in the current RPS?

The current RPS identifies issues and matters under broad themes. Each theme outlines a range of specific issues with associated objectives, policies and methods. The themes within the RPS include:

- tangata whenua
- air quality
- coastal environment
- environmental risk including natural hazards
- freshwater

- built environment, energy and infrastructure
- cultural and historical heritage
- natural resources
- land management.

The issues and approach relating to freshwater are what we are going to focus on at this hui. Key freshwater issues identified in the current RPS are outlined below:

Hapu and iwi cultural requirements for freshwater

- Protect the water's capacity to renew its groundwater and surface water flows and stocks.
- Sustain habitats, breeding, food sources and migratory requirements of mahinga kai species such as eels, flax and watercress, in their freshwater and coastal environments.
- Provide seasonal flow variability via a range of flows including seasonal floods of different magnitudes.
- Protect the exchange of freshwater and seawater at the mouth, maintains freshwater flows in estuaries, and prevents the unnatural closing of a river mouth.
- Enable the longstanding histories and traditional and cultural uses to be maintained.
- Avoid the adverse effects of the unnatural mixing of water from different bodies.

Significant resource management issues for freshwater

- Impacts from inappropriate water abstraction and intensive land use. Erosion and sediment are a problem across the region.
- Impacts from both point-source discharges and diffuse discharges from both urban and rural areas.
- Increasing pressure for water abstraction, particularly the Waipaoa catchment. Need to allocate more efficiently and reduce overallocation.
- Identification of significant waterbodies for their economic, cultural, social or environmental significance.
- The need to identify and fill gaps in existing knowledge around freshwater resources and develop solutions where issues arise.
- Ensuring the significance to tangata whenua of freshwater resources is identified and provided for through kaitiaki.
- Management of natural and physical resources needs to be integrated as much as possible to ensure resource-based activities do not directly or indirectly affect other parts of the environment.

3. Wrap-up of approach to current RPS

The aim of this hui is to consider what are the key freshwater issues facing Tairāwhiti today.

There is a largely 'silo approach' to resource management with little overlap, direction or resolution of key issues across the region in the current RPS. It currently does not describe and address key strategic issues in a way that enables an integrated approach to resolution or management of these issues.

4. Freshwater issues and themes facing Tairāwhiti

This section provides a refresh of issues that have been identified from previous engagement with tangata whenua, the community and other stakeholders.

Members have the opportunity to consider these issues and ask whether they are still relevant and whether there are any issues missing. Members should also consider the scale, effect and prioritisation of these issues prior to the hui.

Freshwater issues facing Tairāwhiti

Effects

Poor water quality and reduced water quantity/flows in streams, rivers and aquifers, loss of cultural connection and depleted mauri

Causative

Forestry, intensive cropping, stock access, climate change, inequitable water allocation, land-use change (rural and urban), poorly planned infrastructure, historical land use decisions, diffuse and point source discharges, lack of data, over-extraction

Issue	Comment
<p>Cultural impacts</p> <p>Providing for the relationship of Māori and their lands, water, sites, wahi tapu and other taonga</p>	<p>Management of freshwater resources should consider effects on physical and spiritual resources of Māori such as taiāpure, kaimoana and wahi tapu.</p> <p>Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and Te Mana o Te Wai need to be threaded through plan making and regulatory regimes.</p> <p>Involvement of iwi, as partners, in freshwater management matters.</p>
<p>Forestry</p>	<p>Forestry activities over the last ten years have created issues related to slash and sediment mobilisation with substantial impacts on freshwater and coastal receiving environments.</p> <p>Resolution of this issue will be a collective effort from industry and Council.</p> <p>The regulatory and non-regulatory environment around forestry activities needs to change, with more stringency and consideration of appropriate form and location for forestry activities.</p>
<p>Existing rural activities</p>	<p>Farming continues to contribute to sediment, nutrients and E. coli entering waterways, having impacts on both the ecological values and water quality for human contact/recreation/mahinga kai.</p> <p>A recent study on erosion (Marden) shows little progress on erosion control over the last 30 years.</p>

	<p>It is still an ongoing issue across the region - does this require further consideration of pastoral land-use change or improvements to farming practices?</p>
<p>Changing rural activities</p>	<p>The region is also influenced by global demand for food which has changed what is grown on Turunga flats and elsewhere.</p> <p>There has been growth in high return, high water demand crops in flat areas with displacement of lower value crops further up the coast.</p> <p>Managing these changes in land use as well as the associated inputs (water/nutrients) is critical for the health of freshwater resources.</p> <p>Some catchments require prioritisation for increased management of these activities due to contextual matters. For instance, Taruheru catchment, being a small catchment with porous soils and intensive cropping activities, has created poor water quality.</p>
<p>Urban development and infrastructure</p>	<p>Gisborne is growing faster than what was forecasted during the development of the RPS.</p> <p>Additional housing places pressure on aging infrastructure leading to poor water quality outcomes through increased levels of contaminants entering waterbodies from wastewater overflows and stormwater.</p> <p>Infrastructure needs to lead growth instead of vice versa - this requires strategic direction to support its implementation.</p> <p>Some areas are more vulnerable to urban growth (e.g., Turunga flats) which may impact the future availability of elite soils.</p> <p>Managing these competing land uses, along with their associated water quality impacts, requires strategic consideration.</p>
<p>Water availability</p>	<p>In some areas, the demand for water during summer outstrips supply (particularly in the flat areas of Tairāwhiti) which has created pressure on water bodies.</p> <p>Climate change will affect the frequency and severity of droughts and ultimately the availability of water during the summer season. Thought will need to be given to how water can be stored and made available when demand is high.</p> <p>A growing urban population will place increasing pressure on the Gisborne municipal water supply.</p> <p>The current main drinking water supply source for Gisborne City is in the Te Arai catchment. The amount of water available for city use will need to be reviewed under the Waipaoa Catchment Plan to give effect to Te Mana o te Wai.</p>

Water allocation, land use and water quality	<p>Irrigation and the application of fertilizer (nitrogen and phosphorous) can lead to the leaching of nutrients into waterways. This is particularly a problem on the Turanga Flats.</p> <p>The relationship between intensive land uses and water quality needs to be identified and managed to ensure that the agricultural activities do not continue to create poor water quality through nutrient losses.</p>
Water allocation regime	<p>Currently water is allocated on a first-in-first basis. This is not considered an equitable system and also does not necessarily result in the most efficient use of the water available in a catchment.</p> <p>Important freshwater values should not be compromised through the limit setting process.</p>
Climate change	<p>Recent weather events have heightened the need for climate change resilience.</p> <p>Changing weather patterns, including more intense storm events will exacerbate erosion and flood-flow impacts.</p> <p>Conversely, the higher likelihood of droughts, will have implications on the flats (in particular the Waipaoa catchment which is predicted to receive less rainfall) where water is essential to cropping activities and drinking water supplies (public and private).</p> <p>The new planning framework will need to recognize and respond to changing weather patterns.</p> <p>Increasing regional resilience to the effects of climate change now and into the future will require a strategic response that includes growth planning, investment into infrastructure (including water storage), and optimization of land use.</p>

The above freshwater-related issues are representative (but not exhaustive) of those present in Tairāwhiti. Based on the Group's experience, we want to know:

- if these are still relevant
- what issues are missing
- which issues are priority to address for the region at a strategic level (through RPS direction).

The key information we want to gather during the hui are outlined in section 5 below, and this is framed as four questions to be discussed and workshopped.

5. Next steps – setting RPS freshwater direction

The RPS provides an opportunity to set the scene and create opportunities for freshwater management at a strategic level. The aim of this hui is to identify the key freshwater management issues for Tairāwhiti so that we can ensure that they are addressed in an

integrated way in the RPS, and in turn through the catchment management plans and the wider TRMP.

Once we have collated the feedback from the hui we will look at how we can best incorporate this into the RPS and ensure that this is then threaded through the TRMP.

6. Key questions for consideration

Questions for the advisory groups

- What do you think the five key strategic freshwater issues for Tairāwhiti are?
- What are the issues that we need to focus on and address to make a positive transformation of our freshwater environments?
- What should our goals and objectives be for these key issues?
- What does being successful in addressing these issues look like?
- What do you think we should do to resolve and manage the issues?